

Defence Review 2016 – Halifax Roundtable Consultation 28 June 2016

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In the course of a long and varied career I have witnessed a number of defence reviews, remarkable swings in the international security environment, major changes in DND funding and capability, and wide variation in the interest and commitment of successive Governments of Canada toward national defence. The thoughts which follow reflect this experience.

The greatest result the Defence Review process can deliver will be to define an optimal force structure for the Canadian Forces i.e. a durable model to work toward. Not everything in this model may be affordable at present but the model should be realistic and present a flexible and deployable general purpose combat capability as the planning basis for the next decade or more. If the Review only identifies what may be currently affordable, focuses on the short term or does not address force structure in detail it will not be of much value for Canada. I will address some thoughts on capability gaps and force structure during the roundtable discussion. In the interim I offer the following for consideration:

- 1. The current CF establishment and related budget level are realistic reference points.** Major increases in either, while obviously desirable, are unlikely.
- 2. Suggestions that DND needs to ‘spend smarter’, ‘improve the tooth to tail ratio’, ‘cut red tape’ and so on have been around for decades.** These are easy to say but harder to deliver. Nonetheless **there now appears to be an expectation that DND will streamline some of its internal HQ processes especially in procurement.** This will require among other things, a culture change in NDHQ which should include: greater risk tolerance, more continuity in senior positions and a long pause in the tradition of continual organizational tinkering.
- 3. Money is going to become tight in the years ahead** and the government will move to balance the budget in due course. When this happens defence spending will be vulnerable. As there is already little confidence in defence procurement across government, DND must move quickly to deliver some major procurement successes and demonstrate value for money.
- 4. In defence planning things will only rarely happen as forecast.** This does not necessarily mean that the planning itself is poor, but the variables which affect it are enormous. These include: an extremely uncertain international environment, evolving threats, rapidly evolving technological capabilities, changing government priorities, uncertain funding levels, and unpredictable natural disasters, to name but a few. A flexible CF response capability which can quickly respond to changing circumstances and changing plans is therefore essential.
- 5. When a crisis erupts there is often little or no notice and the CF will be required to implement the government’s policy requirements with the capability it has at the moment.** Risk may be linked directly to where DND is in the procurement cycle for replacement or introduction of important capabilities.

6. The CF will possess one set of capabilities. What is available to deploy internationally is what is available to use nationally, whether equipment, people, experience or expertise.

7. The CF has to deploy capability. For Canada, national or international deployments are generally at strategic distance. **Strategic lift** is a vital enabler for deployment, domestically or internationally. So is **surveillance**.

8. Canada cannot count on other nations to help out. Every ally wants the US to provide for them in some way. The availability of foreign (Russian and Ukrainian) charter air transport is unlikely to be as available to support future operations as in the past.

9. Short deployments have a way of extending. This is historical fact and ongoing reality.

10. Sustainability must be built in to the force structure. To keep one aircraft, ship, submarine, or battalion on sustained deployment requires at least three in the operational cycle. Robust training, force generation, logistics and support capabilities are all essential for sustained deployed operations.

11. Niche specialization is a gamble which can quickly go very wrong. When the CF has declared a niche specialization in the past it has generally not been by design but in response to budget pressure leading to reduced capability... which has had to be subsequently restored.

12. CF deployment in alliance or coalition ops will continue to be as an identifiable largely self-sustaining Canadian entity. National deployed operations will need to be fully self-sustaining.

13. Interoperability with the US is and will remain essential in equipment, communications, weapons and ammunition, knowledge of doctrine, and experience in operations and leadership positions.

14. The only way to meet Canada's defence requirements is by retaining a flexible general purpose combat capability.

In summary, I suggest that the Defence Review process needs to develop its recommendations on the assumption that:

(a) the CF will be called upon to deploy in very uncertain threat and operational environments in the decades ahead;

(b) the GoC's foreign policy and defence priorities will evolve over time. DND must therefore build in as much operational capability and flexibility as possible. This means a general purpose combat capability; and

(c) all this will happen in a climate of looming fiscal restraint. DND must sort out its requirements, restore confidence in defence procurement and move quickly on capabilities.